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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

19 NOV 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Operations in North Vietnam

1. The program of operations against North Vietnam which we undertook at the President's direction has been underway since March 1970. To date we have mounted a total of fourteen cross-border operations, nine of which were successful. In late July the President asked us to endeavor to double or triple the rate at which these operations were launched. Despite adverse weather and other local factors which delayed the initiation of certain planned raids, eight of these fourteen attacks were carried out between 7 September and 5 November. Three sets of considerations have arisen, however, which make us want to review our planning for the immediate future.

2. The general pattern of these operations has been to helilift a commando raider team to a landing zone in Laos near the North Vietnamese border. The team then infiltrates by foot across the border to an area near the target in North Vietnam, fires rockets on the target, and exfiltrates on foot to a new landing zone on the Laos side, where the team is recovered by helicopter. Because of the distance limitations imposed by the need for foot travel and because of the way operating areas of responsibility are divided between ourselves and MACV, our operations are presently confined to areas within 30 kilometers of the border. There are relatively few targets within this area and since the North Vietnamese have come to realize that such operations are being conducted and to understand their general pattern, surprise is no longer really possible. The whole border area, in fact, is now "hot" and the operational climate therein extremely hostile.

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3. In a sense, the North Vietnam raids are competitive with our interdiction forays in south Laos. Both draw on the same, very finite pool of case officer talent, trained and capable indigenous personnel, and helilift support. The dry season is beginning in the Laos Panhandle and the muddy roads are improving daily. We anticipate a major logistics and personnel infiltration effort on the part of Hanoi and see numerous signs that this push is already beginning. While our North Vietnam raids in the 30 kilometer zone are psychologically useful, their real overall military impact is perforce marginal even with optimum success in the raids themselves. A moderately successful ground interdiction effort in south Laos of sufficient scope to be a real complement to [] (and PRAIRIE FIRE), however, could have a real impact in crimping Hanoi's effort to push needed supplies through the Ho Chi Minh Trail network which is now Hanoi's sole major pipeline of support to its forces in Cambodia and South Vietnam. Thus a concentration of our limited case officer, indigenous personnel and helilift resources on south Laos targets during the weeks immediately ahead would produce considerably greater return than a continued diversion of a significant proportion of these assets to small raids on targets just over the border in North Vietnam.

4. The experience gained to date in our shallow penetrations provides a basis for considering penetration raids much deeper into North Vietnam than 30 kilometers. Deeper penetrations would require developing an ability to use helicopters to lift teams to landing zones within North Vietnam and for using helicopters to pick up teams from other landing zones also within North Vietnam. This is a problem we are now examining. If it can be solved we may be able to mount operations against a new range of considerably more lucrative targets than those to be found in the immediate border area.

5. In light of the above considerations, we recommend a ninety-day suspension of the shallow penetration program. If this approval is granted, we would be disencumbered of the need to continue risky, asset intensive operations against marginal targets in an increasingly hostile operational environment and could concentrate our resources on south

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Laos during the time when real returns can be registered on asset investments there. We could also utilize this three month period to work on the development of more sophisticated and hard-hitting penetration operations deep within North Vietnam.

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Richard Helms
Director

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